

To: All Employees

From: Director

Subject: Take Time to Thank a Veteran

If you're like me, you've probably been consumed this week by the election and what it means for the nation, this agency - and for each of us as individual citizens. That's understandable. As the saying goes, elections have consequences.

But let's not lose sight of the fact that Veterans Day is just around the corner. In fact, I can't think of a better backdrop for Veterans Day than the democratic process in action. As unwieldy as elections may be, the fact that our government changes via the ballot box – and not at the barrel of a gun or death of a monarch – is truly remarkable.

Our veterans have defended this right in war and peace, and many sacrificed their lives or their health to ensure that we have a chance to live in a country where our vote matters.

On Sunday and for the rest of this week, we have the opportunity to stop for a moment and observe Veterans Day, a day that the Department of Veterans Affairs notes “is largely intended to thank LIVING veterans for their service, to acknowledge that their contributions to our national security are appreciated, and to underscore the fact that all those who served – not only those who died – have sacrificed and done their duty.”

Our men and women in uniform make staggering sacrifices, and we owe them an immense debt. More than 1,400 veterans have continued to serve the American people by joining the ranks of the Fish and Wildlife Service. Many of these employees serve in Reserve and National Guard units across the country. Some have seen active duty overseas. Others perform vital duties here at home.

Through programs like Operation Warfighter and Coming Home to Work, we have welcomed home many returning members of the military to new careers conserving the nature of America.

I recently got a note from Ellen Lance, the Endangered Species Branch chief in Anchorage, Alaska. She told me about a young man named Tyler Maples, a decorated infantry paratrooper, who came to her office through Operation Warfighter. She said Tyler's enthusiasm and positive, can-do attitude allowed him to quickly learn the software he was assigned to update and help the ES staff use it better.

I am also reminded of Chuck and LeeAnn Kelso, a married couple who work in the South Florida Ecological Services Office. Both are veterans of the U.S. Army, and they met at Fort Benning while on active duty. In addition to Chuck and LeeAnn, 11 of their family members have served or continue to serve in America's Armed Forces. It all started with Chuck's great-great-great uncle, who fought in the Civil War and died at Camp Sumter, also called Andersonville Prison.

There are hundreds of women and men with similar stories, people who are our friends and colleagues. I encourage you to check out the Service home page this week, where you'll see photos and stories about many of them.

In fiscal year 2012 we hired 232 veterans. We'll continue to make hiring veterans a priority for the future as we welcome them back from Afghanistan and other deployments here at home and overseas.

We talk a lot about how the conservation world is changing rapidly. In reality, the whole world is moving along at a blistering pace. I know none of us seems to have a moment to spare, but I hope you will find time this weekend to express your gratitude to our veterans. They have given us an incredible gift.

Just think back to the election. Our country elected a leader, without violence, without bloodshed. Millions of people who didn't vote for him accepted the results, and pledged to support him. The freedoms and laws our Founders developed made sure of that. But it is the brave men and women in uniform who stand watch and guarantee it.

Thank you, veterans.

Dan

Dan Ashe,

Director